

MOUNT JEFFERSON STATE NATURAL AREA PARK PROFILE

PARK PURPOSE STATEMENT

Mount Jefferson State Natural Area was established in 1956 when the efforts of local citizens led to the acquisition of 400 acres of land. The establishment was the culmination of an extensive local effort to create a public park on the scenic mountain top. The natural area serves North Carolina's residents and visitors by protecting wildlife and natural communities within the park, providing opportunities and facilities for viewing and enjoying the major scenic values of the area, providing opportunities for appropriate outdoor recreational use, and providing interpretive and environmental programs that educate park visitors on the plant life, geology, and ecology of the land.

Significant biological resources include high elevation plant communities that occur above the 4,000 foot high elevation on Rocky Summit, as well as diverse forests on the lower slopes. The high elevation plant communities include Red Oak Forest and the exposed Rocky Summit and Heath Bald communities. The fragile plant communities associated with the rock outcroppings at higher elevations include a number of rare species. American chestnut once dominated many of the lower slopes, but these now grade from Northern Hardwood Forest and Rich Cove Forest on the northern slopes to Montane White Oak Forest on other slopes. The mountain was designated as a National Natural Landmark in 1974.

Amphibolite outcroppings at the mountain peak are the most significant geological resources. These outcroppings are particularly evident at two locations, the Luther's Rock Overlook and a second area extending from the peak down along the eastern ridge of the mountain.

The panoramic views from Mount Jefferson are the natural area's most significant scenic values. The mountain vistas toward the Blue Ridge Mountains have attracted visitors for decades and generated the initial local interest in the park's establishment. The best views are from the granite outcroppings on the peak that rise 1,600 feet above the surrounding area. The mountain is an important scenic landmark on the local landscape.

Mount Jefferson was authorized as a state natural area so that its geological, biological and scenic values could be protected. The Division of Parks and Recreation is charged with preserving these values and with providing natural area experiences that promote pride in and understanding of North Carolina's natural heritage.

PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

Geology: Mount Jefferson appears to be an inselberg, an isolated mountain surrounded by mountain ranges. The outcroppings provide an excellent opportunity for interpretive study of the formation and subsequent erosion of the Southern Appalachian Mountains.

Unique Plant Communities: Mount Jefferson contains a diversified aggregation of unique plant communities, including many disjunct species that usually occur farther north. For example, the Big Toothed Aspen community on the north-facing slope of the mountain is more commonly seen from West Virginia to Canada.

STATISTICS

Visitation (1999)	103,566
Operating Budget (FY 98-99)	\$ 200,365
Revenue (FY 98-99)	\$ 756

VISITOR FACILITIES

Picnic area with 32 tables and shelter

2 Hiking trails (1.3 miles total)

CONSTRUCTION AND RENOVATION NEEDS

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| 1 | The office/summit toilets/exhibits renovation project consists of demolishing the existing office and shed, providing 4 benches, 10-car and 1-bus parking lot, a new park entrance sign, repaving the maintenance yard, renovating the walkway, constructing a 3500 sq.ft. office/interpretive building, extending water service, constructing a maintenance wing, renovating the summit toilet, providing exhibit diorama, and providing office furniture and equipment. | \$ 1,576,424 |
| 2 | The trail development/interpretive signage project will construct 2 miles of new trail and install 3 small sheltered display cases (one at each overlook at Summit Parking area), 3 exhibits, and 10 trail sign with posts. | 165,529 |

TOTAL: \$ 1,741,953

REGISTERED NATURAL HERITAGE AREA

Mount Jefferson Registered Natural Heritage Area: The entire park is a Registered Natural Heritage Area. Natural communities include High Elevation Red Oak Forest, Heath Bald, High Elevation Rocky Summit, and Northern Hardwood Forest. Numerous rare plant species occur here, including rusty cliff fern, trailing wolfbane, and bigtooth aspen.

FUTURE LAND ACQUISITION NEEDS

Completion of the Mount Jefferson State Natural Area masterplan will require the acquisition of 1000 acres. Land acquisition objectives include protection of the park entrance, elimination of access control problems and protection of the representative natural communities on Mount Jefferson.

Master Plan Total Acreage	1,489 acres
Current Park Acreage	<u>489 acres</u>
Acquisition Needs	1,000 acres

1999 STAFF POSITIONS

Permanent		Seasonal		Peak Load	
Park Superintendent II	1	Park Attendant	1	Park Attendant	2
Park Ranger II	1	Seasonal Ranger	2		
Park Ranger I	1				
Maintenance Mechanic IV	1				
Maintenance Mechanic II	1				
Office Assistant III - halftime	1				

PROPOSED STAFF ADDITIONS

Permanent		Seasonal		Peak Load	
Park Ranger I	1	General Utility Worker	1	Clerk/Typist	1
Environmental Specialist	1				